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Ex-GI charged with espionage

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Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — A man said to have led a double life as a US Army warrant officer and an honorary colonel in the Russian army was arrested yesterday on charges of selling top-secret coding information to the Soviet Union between January 1963 and July 1964.

Joseph George Helmich, 44, who has been working as a tile installer, was ordered held in lieu of \$500,000 bond after US Atty. Gary Betz told a federal magistrate that Helmich had attained the rank of colonel in the Soviet army.

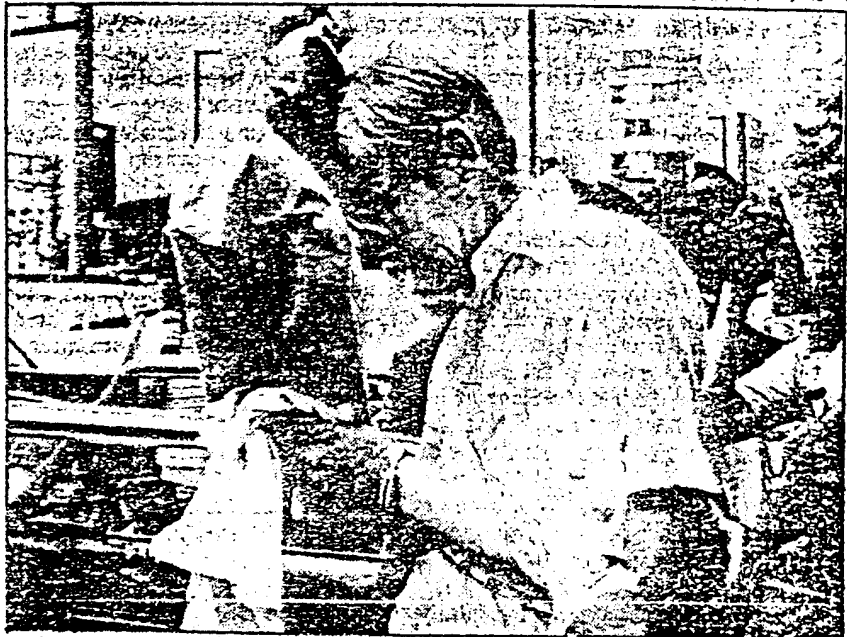
Helmich, 44, identified as a native of Fort Lauderdale, was charged with one count of conspiracy and three of espionage, including charges that he sold various coding manuals and equipment to the Soviets for \$131,000. Conviction on each count carries a top penalty of life in prison.

Betz argued for high bond at the US District Court session, saying money and escape plans had been prepared to help Helmich flee.

"This individual is an extreme risk to flee the charges alleged against him," Betz told US Magistrate Howard T. Snyder, who set the bond. "Our investigation has determined that there were funds put away for his use outside the United States."

"This defendant received certain honors, including the rank of colonel in the Soviet army," Betz said.

During the 35-minute court session, the prosecutor did not elaborate on Helmich's alleged ties with the Soviets, and he refused to do so afterward.



Joseph G. Helmich, a former Army code expert, tries to hide his face as he leaves federal court in Jacksonville after his arrest yesterday on charges of selling secret information to Soviet Union. UPI PHOTO

Betz and Lawrence Lawler, the agent in charge of the local FBI office, declined to say when the investigation started.

Both declined to comment on how authorities learned of Helmich's alleged activities.

Helmich, who moved to the northeast Florida coast about a month ago from Niagara Falls, N.Y., was charged late Tuesday in a four-count indictment. He was arrested yesterday at 7:40 a.m. without incident at his parents' home, where he lived with his wife and one child.

He appeared in court unshaven, wearing blue pants, a short-sleeve shirt and black boots.

Helmich, telling the magistrate that he was broke, asked for and received a court-appointed counsel.

Arraignment was set for this morning.

Helmich is the third person arrested on spying charges in the United States in the past month. Late in June, Marian Zacharski, a 29-year-old Polish businessman, and Hughes Aircraft engineer William Holden Bell were charged with selling US defense documents to Poland. Both pleaded innocent.

The indictment accused Helmich of selling the Soviets secret information, including parts and service manuals for American military coding equipment known as the KL7 Cryptosystem, which he operated while an Army warrant officer from 1954 to 1966.

Most of the deals allegedly took place while Helmich was based in Paris, the indictment charged.